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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PETR](#) [PE](#)  
SUBJECT: SHINING PATH IN THE VRAE

REF: A. LIMA 329  
[1](#)B. LIMA 7  
[1](#)C. LIMA 1678  
[1](#)D. LIMA 1809  
[1](#)E. LIMA 1699

Classified By: Amb. P Michael McKinley for reasons 1.4b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Apurimac and Ene River Valley (VRAE), a remote jungle area east of the Andes straddling northern Ayacucho and parts of several other regions, is home to the most resilient of the remaining two armed factions of the Shining Path (SL). The SL faction in the VRAE is led by three veteran SL commanders, who most observers estimate lead about 250 hardcore fighters backed by a network of some 350 collaborators. Most officials and analysts consulted by Poloff in Ayacucho argued that these SL remnants are primarily a narcotrafficking organization focused on self-preservation and making money whose political goals are now secondary. (We do not fully agree with this view.) To survive, the faction has adopted tactics designed to woo local communities and transform their image as hardened terrorists, and may be seeking to increase its contacts with the outside world. A recent spike in killings by SL, including the deadly April 9 attack (septel), probably reflects a reaction to the government's military push into an SL stronghold (refs) rather than the oft-repeated "resurgence" of the organization. End Summary.

#### Background on the VRAE

[1](#)2. (C) The Apurimac and Ene River Valley (VRAE), a subtropical area east of the Andes straddling northern Ayacucho and parts of several other bordering regions, is home to the most resilient of the remaining two armed factions of the Shining Path (SL) terrorist organization. (Note: The other armed faction holds out in the Upper Huallaga Valley in northern Peru. End Note.) In the 1990s, SL retreated to the remote jungle-covered valley under pressure from the Peruvian military and established a refuge in an area called Vizcatan from which it has launched strikes throughout the VRAE and surrounding areas (ref A). The valley has roughly 250,000 inhabitants dispersed among small communities and farms, according to a local contact, and the main agricultural product is the coca leaf, which is reportedly grown openly throughout the VRAE.

#### SL Leadership in the VRAE

[1](#)3. (C) SL in the VRAE is led by Victor Quispe Palomino (aka

"Jose"), his brother Jorge (aka "Raul"), and his military commander "Alipio", who is believed to be Leonardo Huaman Zuniga. Jose is in his early 50s, according to a security consultant that operates in the VRAE, and has been a member of SL since at least the mid-1980s when he was briefly arrested by police. Jose is accused of leading SL fighters in a massacre of 69 peasants at Lunamarca in the 1980s. Raul, like his brother, has been an SL member for over two decades and is accused of leading several small attacks in the VRAE in recent years. Alipio, described in press reports as a cold-blooded killer, is in his 70s and suffers from tuberculosis, according to the security consultant. The three commanders describe their SL faction in pamphlets as the "Peruvian Communist Party -- Marxist-Leninist-Maoist" and their VRAE command as the Central Regional Committee. Most analysts label them the SL "proseguir" faction because it broke with SL founder Abimael Guzman and determined to fight on against the government when Guzman called for a negotiated settlement in the mid-1990s. An Ayacucho regional government official told Poloff that Jose and Alipio have so much blood on their hands that they could never reintegrate into society, but continue the fight out of lack of options and desperation. They would much rather go into exile abroad than live in the jungle, the official speculated, but they have no choice.

#### SL Forces in the VRAE

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14. (C) Most observers estimate that Jose, Raul, and Alipio command about 250 hardcore fighters, backed by a network of some 350 collaborators. According to a local Interior Ministry official with informants throughout the valley, only a few dozen SL fighters remain permanently mobilized, while most live among the communities of the area. When SL wants to launch a major attack using thirty or more men, the mobilized units go from community to community collecting their comrades for battle. SL terrorists use a wide variety of weapons of differing makes mainly in 9 mm, 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm caliber sizes, which observers say suggests they do not have consistent suppliers. SL leaders claimed in a recent manifesto that they get their weapons primarily by ambushing and robbing military patrols. The Interior official alleged that SL is also seeking (without success) to purchase a shoulder-fired rocket to knock down government helicopters. The same official also told us that his sources said SL fighters had fathered some 150 children who they keep under tight protection in a cave where they store obsolete weapons.

#### Dogmatic Terrorists or Criminal Narcotraffickers?

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15. (C) The majority of officials and analysts consulted by Poloffs in Ayacucho argued that SL in the VRAE is primarily a drug-trafficking rather than a subversive organization. According to this argument, Alipio and Jose still have their communist ideals and political dreams, but neither realistically believes they can achieve the power that SL enjoyed at its height. With no other options for survival, the SL leaders turned to protecting drug traffickers and coca growers for payment. Asked why SL continues to proselytize about Communism in pamphlets and directly to locals, one analyst argued that this was just a smokescreen to convince communities that the group is not simply a gang of criminals. Another analyst observed that SL in the VRAE exhibits some characteristics of both a subversive and drug-trafficking group and cannot be described exclusively as one or the other. But as time goes on, he argued, new recruits increasingly care about the financial and criminal aspects of the group rather than its political ideals. Few true believers appear to remain.

16. (C) (Note: Although the argument that SL is a narcotrafficking organization was prevalent in Ayacucho, we continue to believe that SL holds political views and follows military tactics more akin to a terrorist group. And at least one prominent analyst argues compellingly that SL remains a terrorist group with scaled-down political goals. This analyst told Poloff that Jose had recently claimed

publicly he wanted to start a new stage of combat targeting US counter-drug interests. Anti-US rhetoric was also a marked component of the VRAE faction's recent manifesto. We will explore this argument more fully in septel. End Note.)

#### Kinder, Gentler SL Thugs

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17. (C) To adjust to their comparatively isolated and weakened state, the SL remnants have adopted tactics designed to woo the local population and to transform their image from battle-hardened terrorists and killers to something less menacing. Although SL continues to use violence against both the security forces that confront them and "traitors" in the community, the group generally does not kill locals, innocent bystanders or outsiders passing through. One contact said the SL briefly kidnapped a local mayor in 2005 to inform him that they believed in development and would accept the planned construction of a new road in the area as long as security forces did not use it. Another contact told Poloff that SL once stopped him at a roadblock and lectured him and others for several hours on Communism and how SL no longer harmed civilians. In October 2008, SL fighters reportedly entered the exploration camp of a US mining company, lectured the workers on Communism, stole munitions, and left without harming anyone (ref D). Several local contacts also reported that SL fighters regularly enter communities and pay several times the going price for local products.

#### Seeking Contact with the Outside World

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18. (C) Shining Path leaders in the VRAE may also be seeking to increase contact with the outside world. The Interior Ministry official in Ayacucho told Poloff he had established indirect communication with some SL leaders via an informant in the VRAE. SL requested that the official provide medicines and 230 identity documents to allow some of their fighters to come and go from the VRAE without risking arrest. The official said he provided some medicines to build trust, and showed Poloff a letter in which an SL fighter thanked him personally. He added that he had convinced the fighter to give him radio frequencies so he could locate his SL contacts in the future. The security consultant operating in the VRAE told Poloff that in an effort to gather intelligence he had even contacted and met with Jose and Alipio, who had delivered him a video and requested that he show it to the outside world. (Note: We have not yet seen the video and cannot confirm its existence. End Note.) In late March 2009, Jose provided a media interview to a prominent counter-drug analyst in which he claimed that Abimael Guzman -- not Jose and his faction -- was responsible for all past human rights violations committed by SL.

#### Comment: Shining Path More Entrenched Than Resurgent

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19. (C) SL has long been entrenched in the VRAE, enjoying nearly a decade of free reign to operate across the area undisturbed by the presence of state security forces. In August 2008, when the GOP began military operations to pacify the valley (ref), the SL's entrenched and powerful position enabled it to actively resist and respond to the incursion with high-impact violence. In our view, this fact, rather than a "resurgence" per se of SL (as media and other reports have claimed) best explains the recent spike of terrorist violence, including the deadly April 9 ambushes against military forces, in the zone. Whatever the case, SL in the VRAE remains and should remain a priority concern for a government interested in eliminating Peru's terrorist threat once and for all.

MCKINLEY